DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 565 FL 023 927

AUTHOR Malcolm, Ian G.
TITLE Aboriginal Student Enclaves as Discourse Communities.
PUB DATE 22 Mar 96
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (18th, Chicago, IL, March 23-26, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *College Environment; College Students; Discourse Analysis; Foreign Countries; Group Dynamics; Higher Education; *Indigenous Populations; *Language Patterns; *Language Role; Language Usage; Literacy; Minority Groups; Multicampus Colleges; Nonverbal Communication; Oral Language; School Orientation; *Student Subcultures
IDENTIFIERS *Aboriginal Schools (Australia); Australia; *Discourse Communities; Edith Cowan University (Australia)

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the role of the Aboriginal Student Enclave, one of five campuses of Edith Cowan University (Australia) as a discourse community. The relatively small but cohesive university subcommunity is designed to provide additional support for Aboriginal students enrolled in standard programs and an environment in which the students are not a racial minority. Data were drawn from observation of 10 full-time students in an orientation course. Three groups were identified, based on communicative behaviors and dependence on the larger group. One group formed the enclave's core, who needed the group most. Their message forms were phatic exchanges, joking, and teasing, and they read aloud to each other as they read individually. Communication was face-to-face, supported by extensive non-verbal communication, including laughter and physical contact. They used a standard English code with a casual style. Topics of conversation centered on personal behavior and attributes, social activities, family life, and shared experience, but excluded coursework. Communication provided solidarity, reinforced group values, and set the higher education experience within an agreed group perspective. Implications are drawn for education of Aborigine and other minority group students. Contains 13 references. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 396 565

Aboriginal Student Enclaves as Discourse Communities

Ian G. Malcolm

Edith Cowan University

Western Australia.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ian G. Malcolm

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper for presentation to the Conference of the American Association of Applied Linguistics,

Chicago, March 23-26, 1996.

FL023927

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Discourse Communities and Universities

The term *discourse community* has been helpfully used by John Swales (1990) to refer to special interest groups whose members communicate with one another by means of a number of mainly written mechanisms and which possess one or more established genres and some specific lexis which they hold in common. For Swales, a discourse community may be distinguished from a *speech community* in that the former is a sociorhetorical grouping while the latter is a sociolinguistic one. Communicative groupings comprised mainly of "novices" in the area of special interest, or which "borrow" genres rather than owning them, are excluded by Swales from being covered by the term discourse community.

What, then, is an appropriate name for a discourse community in formation, such as we find in the university setting? Does it need a separate definition? Perhaps, following the pattern of undergraduate versus graduate we could call it a *discourse undercommunity*. But I can't imagine that term gaining popularity. Alternatively, perhaps, recognising the common use of the term *literacy event* to refer to events "in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role" (Anderson, Teale and Estrada, 1980) we could call student groupings who distinctively construct such events *literacy communities*. Again, however, the term creates as many problems as it solves. It seems we are left with either the over-broad, though safe, term *speech community*, as developed by Hymes (1972:xxxviii), or the term *discourse community* but in a looser sense than that proposed by Swales. I have chosen to take the latter course in this paper.

The concept of *discourse community* may be seen to relate to universities in both its broader and its narrower interpretation. First, universities are important repositories of the products of discourse communities and incorporate many of their members. Second, they help to maintain discourse communities by contributing to the professional formation of successive cohorts of new members who can understand and employ the appropriate discourse. Third, they sustain constantly renewing temporary groupings of communicating members whose unifying discourses are the literacy events of the undergraduate environment.

Research carried out at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, in 1994 by Malcolm and McGregor (1995) suggested that students who were native speakers of English could be distinguished

from students who were non-native speakers of English with respect to the communicative strategies they employed in classrooms and in service encounters. In some cases, the same literacy event was viewed as functionally different by students from these two groups. These findings were not entirely unexpected, however an unexpected finding was that *neither* group of students showed a close identification with the university's official view of itself as a community of learning. The groups of students studied revealed themselves as sub-communities within the wider university community in which they viewed their membership as less than complete.

The focus of this paper will be on another sub-community which current research is focusing on: the relatively small but cohesive community of students who are members of the Aboriginal Student Enclave, one of the five campuses of Edith Cowan University. An attempt will be made to describe this enclave as a discourse community (in the sense I have foreshadowed above) and how it relates to the macro-community of the university. Implications of this description for the education of minority students at university will then be briefly considered.

Aboriginal Student Enclaves Within Australian Universities

The indigenous people of Australia, comprising Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, constitute approximately 1.6 per cent of the population, and, although their participation in higher education is rapidly increasing, it is lower than that of the remainder of the population. In 1993 some 5,578 indigenous people were attending Australian public universities, which is 1.3% of all Australian students in percentage terms. There is, at present, no Aboriginal university in Australia and so Aboriginal students experience university life as members of a small and culturally divergent minority. For many such students entering university life is associated with stress and fear. Louise Kearing (1977:65), described in a conference paper her experience in entering higher education in 1976 as a mature aged student in the following terms:

> *One of the most frightening things that I faced in coming to college was mixing with white people.I hadn't much mixed with them before coming here because in Pinjarra, the whites and the Aboriginals don't mix very much...So coming here meant the opening up of a whole new world.*

She observed that her main support in the adjustment to higher education came from meeting and sharing experiences with other Aboriginal students, especially since they knew that, among Aborigines outside of the institution, they might suffer being labelled "bigheads" (Kearing, 1977:66).

Experiences like that of Louise Kearing were matched by those of many other Aboriginal students as they began to find places in higher education in the early 70s. Understandably, many such students expressed the desire to have some place on campus where they could be surrounded only by Aboriginal people and could relax and be themselves rather than, as students in one survey put it, having to "act like students" (Sherwood, et al, 1980:117).

It was in response to such requests that the idea of *Aboriginal Student Enclave* (now generally referred to as Aboriginal Student Centres) arose. An Australian Government report described enclaves in the following terms:

> *Enclaves are support programs which provide Aboriginal people enrolled in standard courses in tertiary institutions with additional support to enable them to cope with the often alien atmosphere of a tertiary institution. The essential elements of an enclave program are:*
>
> *a) provision of staff whose role is to assist students in dealing with their course work and developing the necessary skills to proceed through the course to graduation. This involves both counselling support and providing ... for special tutorials i.e. personal and academic support.*
>
> *b) provision of a separate area for students' use.* (House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, 1985:152)

The enclave, then, is a clearly marked sub-community within the University, with its own area and with certain designated staff. Within the enclave, students may interact with one another on their own terms and receive help in as diverse areas as study needs, accommodation, child care and finances.

The first such student enclave was established in the South Australian Institute of Technology, Adelaide, around 1973, but by the mid 80s they had become standard provisions in

higher education institutions in response to the fact that the existence of an enclave became the deciding factor, as far as many Aboriginal students were concerned, as to whether or not they would enrol (House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, 1985:152-153). The popularity and success of enclaves is well documented (e.g. Sherwood, et al, 1980; House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, 1985). They have come to be commonly provided not only for on-campus but for off-campus Aboriginal students through regional centres in rural and remote areas (Hubble, 1982). For the non-traditional Aboriginal student they have been one of the significant factors in improving Aboriginal participation in higher education (Sherwood, in House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, 1985:153).

Aboriginal student enclaves provide a kind of "half-way-house" for Aboriginal students in higher education and as such they are associated with distinctive discourse patterns. These are shown in a range of particular literacy events which take place in the enclaves, including one-to-one tutoring and counselling, special intensive tuition for students from rural areas spending "block release" weeks on campus, and other kinds of lectures and classes which operate distinctively because of the 100% Aboriginal composition of the class. There is also the student common room in which students are free to drop the "student act" and allow Aboriginal discourse conventions to prevail.

The National Research Project "Framing Student Literacy"

Funding from the Australian government through the Australian Research Council in 1995 enabled four universities to undertake cooperatively a two-year study of the framing of student literacy in Australian higher education, sensitive to variations according to the year of study, the disciplines studied, the cultural background of the students and the first learned language of the students. Teams at the University of Western Australia and Macquarie University are focusing particularly upon student writing; a team at Curtin University of Technology is focusing upon student reading and a team at Edith Cowan University is focusing upon the way in which Aboriginal students participate in literacy events. The whole project is unified by its attempt to comprehend the literacy practices it is observing through the theoretical construct of frame theory. The work that is being reported on in this paper is associated with the component of the project which is being carried out at Edith Cowan University. It is beyond the purposes of this paper to describe that whole sub-project in detail. Rather,

we shall be considering the student enclave and its discourse dimension as a relatively self-contained element of the larger project.

Edith Cowan University in 1995 had an overall student population of 18,058 and an Aboriginal student population of 359. The latter include students enrolled in degree courses either on campus, in regional centres and externally. Some of the external students come into the enclave twice a year when they are brought onto campus for a week's intensive tuition. A majority of the Aboriginal students enrolled in the university (64%) are engaged in bridging courses to prepare themselves for entry to university degrees. Like the degree students, some of these are on campus, some in regional centres and some external. All consenting Aboriginal students of the university were included in this study.

A research assistant employed on the project has been attached to the enclave for more than a year now and is gathering data by means of extended non-participant observation, which has increasingly overlapped with participant observation as students from the enclave have got to know her well and have consulted her as a sympathetic senior student. No tape recording has been carried out (this being seen as too intrusive in this context) but detailed field and retrospective notes have been taken. A large number of class and one-to-one interactions have been observed and, where appropriate, discussed informally with the participants. In addition, staff of the enclave (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) have been interviewed, student examination scripts and essays have been gathered and are being analysed and a survey of bidialectal speech use has been conducted. Since the university is a multi-campus institution, other members of the project team have been gathering data on another campus and in regional centres, but data from only one will be reported on here.

Aboriginal Student Enclaves as Discourse Communities

The discussion of the functioning of the student enclave which will be presented here is based on observations of a group of ten full-time students who, at the time of the investigation, were engaged in studies for the Aboriginal University Orientation Course, a bridging course which enables students who have not met normal matriculation requirements to proceed, if they are successful, and if they so desire, to degree studies in mainstream awards. Henceforth in this discussion, "the enclave" will refer to these ten students.

While it is the objective of this paper to provide as well-documented a description as possible of the operation of discourse within the enclave, it is an equally important objective to respect the confidentiality of enclave members. For this reason, identifiable references to enclave members and their behaviours have been excluded from this presentation.

As a basis for the description of the enclave, we shall first discuss the internal social structuring of the group and then the major components of their communicative behaviour, adopting categories developed by Dell Hymes (1968) within the framework of the ethnography of speaking.

It should be pointed out that Western Australia has a land mass comparable to that of Western Europe although its population is only 1.7 million, only 2.7% of whom are Aboriginal. The Aboriginal students at Edith Cowan University come from communities widely dispersed across the state and the students in this enclave were not acquainted with one another before they came to the university. It was possible, on the basis of their communicative behaviours, to distinguish three groups among the ten students. We shall refer to these as the *in-group*, the *intermediate group* and the *out-group*.

The in-group comprised a small group of male and female students, all relatively recent school-leavers. They all intended to continue their studies at degree level after completing the orientation course, although they were not necessarily more able than students in the other two groups. They attended regularly and rarely left the Aboriginal student common room except to go to lectures or to the refectory to get their lunch which they would bring back with them and eat (often sharing) with their fellows in the enclave. They were urban-oriented and typically focused on popular magazines, which they were able to browse through in the common room, on sporting events and on the night life of the city. Their preferred communication was all with one another and they had characteristic ways of referring to one another by nicknames relating to their social or work life. They would respond to communication from the research assistant, but they would never initiate it. This group constituted the "heart" of the enclave.

The intermediate group was a similar-sized group of students of more mature age. They spent less time on campus than members of the in-group and had more outside commitments. By contrast

with the in-group they were less dependent on the enclave, though they clearly enjoyed being a part of it. The members of the intermediate group were able to move in and.out of communication with the members of the in-group with apparent ease although they were not a part of that group. Unlike members of the in-group, they would readily initiate communication with other members of the enclave and with the research assistant.

The out-group comprised members who were irregular in attendance and committed to their own pursuits outside the university. They were not at all dependent on the enclave and, within it, they were uncommunicative both with their classmates and with staff and the research assistant.

The enclave was, then, most needed by the in-group, who expressed its core values in the most concentrated way. These core values included, predominantly, enjoyment of the group life, sharing and a lack of pretention. The other students assented to these values but were also able to show independence of the group.

As a discourse community, the core of the enclave could be briefly characterised as follows:

SENDERS/RECEIVERS	Aboriginal members of the in-group
MESSAGE FORMS	Phatic exchanges, joking, teasing, name-calling.
	Reading as a group-oriented activity (i.e. quoting to the group
from	magazine articles in the course of reading)
CHANNELS	Face-to-face spoken communication, supported by extensive non-verbal communication, including constant laughter and frequent physical contact
CODES	Standard English, casual style
TOPICS	Personal behaviour and attributes of group members, social activities, family life, shared experience (not including
the	subject matter of course work)
SETTINGS	Aboriginal student common room, lecture rooms between lectures.

FUNCTIONS	Solidarity; reinforcement of group values, setting the higher education experience within an agreed group perspective.

The discourse conventions of the enclave were not typical of informal student interaction in the campus at large. The essence of the distinctiveness of the behaviour within the enclave might be best expressed by the observation that the students interacted like a big family, with constant good-humoured teasing and ready displays of mutual trust and affection.

Implications for University Education of Aborigines and Other Minority Peoples

We observed earlier on that the existence of an Aboriginal Student Enclave is one of the most important factors to many Aborigines in determining whether or not they will enter higher education. The ways in which communication functions in the enclave show that it fills a need which in some students is particularly marked to switch out of the wider academic community and its heavily monitored communication styles and back to the secure environment of one's own people. This environment excludes things academic and is ruled by good humour and lack of pretention.

When the students emerge from the Aboriginal student common room and attend lectures in homogeneous classes with lecturers who are attached to the enclave, it is not uncommon for them to carry over some of the communicative behaviours of the enclave into this situation. This may involve Aboriginal English vocabulary and the interpolation into the discourse of jocular comments and group references. These classes, like the common room, constitute a sheltered environment where the "student act" does not need to be sustained as strictly as in mainstream classes, and as such, they provide a bridge for the Aboriginal student towards the discourse community (or "under-community") which the university needs to provide an initiation to as an element of professional formation.

In these sheltered classes it is not uncommon to have Aboriginal students engage in a process of feeding back to the lecturer in simple English their perception of what has been given to them in the language of the discipline. This is a deliberate strategy which represents, perhaps, a prolonging of the control of their familiar language over this setting. According to Louise Kearing, the student

whom we quoted previously, Aboriginal students' need for this kind of translation goes on for some six months after entering a mainstream degree course (1977:66).

It seems clear then that many Australian Aboriginal students, probably in common with other minority group students in similar circumstances, require the support of both a communicative retreat (as in the common room) and a communicative sheltered place (as in the classes conducted within the enclave) before they are confident about moving into the typical university context which uses communication modelled on that of an established discourse community. There is a continuity between what we have observed in university classrooms with Aboriginal students and what has been observed in many school classrooms. As Max Hart has put it, there is often in Aboriginal school classrooms an "underworld life of nonending communication" (1974:120). The enclave enables this underworld to have its legitimate life recognized and provides a necessary affirmation and reassurance to the Aboriginal higher education student who is still in this age appropriately seen as a pioneer in a largely untrekked domain.,

REFERENCES

Anderson, A.B., Teale, W.B. and Estrada E. (1980) "Low-income children's preschool literacy experience: some naturalistic observations. The Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Human Cognition 2, 3: 59-65.

Hart, Max (1974) KULILA: On Aboriginal Education. Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company.

Heath, Shirley Brice (1983) Ways With Words. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education (1985) Aboriginal Education. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Hubble, Doug (1982) "Alternatives for Aboriginal teacher education." In John Sherwood (ed.) Aboriginal Education: Issues and Innovations. Perth: Creative Research, pp. 181-190.

Hymes, Dell (1968) "The ethnography of speaking." In Joshua A. Fishman (ed.) Readings in the Sociology of Language. The Hague: Mouton, pp. 99-138.

Hymes, Dell (1972) "Introduction." In Courtney B. Cazden, Vera P. John and Dell Hymes (eds.) Functions of Language in the Classroom. New York: Teachers College Press, pp. xi-vii.

Kearing, Louise (1977) "From housework to school." In Ed Brumby and Neville Green (eds.) Preparing Teachers for Aboriginal Education. Perth: Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, Mount Lawley College of Advanced Education, pp. 65-67.

Malcolm, Ian G. (1995a) "Framing communication in higher education: ethnic difference and exclusion." Paper presented to the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association Conference. Perth: Edith Cowan University.

Malcolm, Ian G. (1995b) "Language and prejudice 'both ways': implications for education." Paper presented to the 20th Annual Congress of the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia. Canberra: Australian National University.

Malcolm, Ian G. and McGregor, Alastair L. (1995) Worlds Apart: An Investigation of Linguistic and Cultural Factors Affecting Communication Between NESB Students and Edith Cowan University Staff. Perth: Centre for Applied Language Research, Edith Cowan University.

Sherwood, John, Davies, Eversley, Froyland, Irene and Moore, Dean (1980) Training Aborigines as Teachers: The ASTI Project at Mount Lawley College 1976-79. Perth: Intercultural Studies Centre, Mount Lawley College.

Swales, John M. (1990) Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.